

Kinship Panel Recommendations to Los Angeles County's Blue Ribbon Commission on Child Protection

November 15, 2013

The following five recommendations are presented by Relative Caregivers, kinship service providers, and kinship advocates from across Los Angeles County to address safety and well-being for the children living with relatives. Children living with relatives make up more than 50% of all open placements, as well as a great number of arrangements outside of DCFS. Implementing these reforms will demonstrate that the policy of finding and placing children with families first is valued by DCFS as a real partnership with the families who step up towards achieving safety, permanency, and better outcomes for children.

Create strict and binding due process protocols - Madelyn Gordon, ex-Relative Caregiver, Executive Director, Grandparents As Parents (GAP)

Resolving case complaints in a timely manner builds confidence for clients that a system is responsive and values their contribution. For families without an advocate they are stuck not knowing who to call, or whether anyone will respond to their concerns about their case. LA County has a model case complaint process that is binding and has strict protocols at DPSS. Create a similar process for DCFS.

Provide the Kinship Orientation and the full Kinship Education Preparation and Support (KEPS) program and orientation for all relatives - Mary Lee, Relative Caregiver

Provide training for all relatives, and make sure case carrying staff are knowledgeable about these programs and actively referring relative caregivers. All kinship families need access to this orientation and program, regardless of whether they enter through dependency or probate court, or are uninvolved in the child welfare system. Relative caregivers waste valuable time and energy searching for resources and information without programs like these. DCFS should have an interest in continuously improving the training and promoting the training for all relative placements, in a local setting and with childcare.

Provide emergency funds to help families meet home safety standards in a timely manner - Reina Villatoro, Relative Caregiver, Kinship in Action, Community Coalition

Children are often placed with relatives with little more than the clothing on their backs to relatives just getting by on their own, and help children and the County avoid having to go to stranger's homes because a bed cannot be found. Providing emergency funds for child care, clothing, food, beds, and other basic needs to make sure relatives are able to keep the children in their home, meet home safety standards ensuring that children are not subjected to further neglect and families are not penalized for choosing to remain together.

Create neighborhood-based Kinship Centers - Cheral Hymen, Relative Caregiver, Founder, R.O.C.K. (Raising Our Children's Kids)

Across LA County are known clusters of kinship populations. Families who are not eligible for an open DCFS case have no fewer needs than those with open cases. Neighborhood-based Kinship Centers should have kinship social workers focused on outreach and raising awareness among kinship families about which resources exist and where they can go, locally, to have their needs met. Kinship social workers should

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also utilize their expertise in working with kinship to train case carrying social workers on how to best engage and work with family members. Partnering with effective community programs like Grandparents As Parents (GAP), R.O.C.K. (Raising Our Children's Kids), Advocates 4 Family Caregivers, and Community Coalition's Kinship program, and others will connect families with knowledgeable programs and effective advocates to get their needs met

Increase the number of social workers and train them to value families - Peggy Scott, Relative Caregiver, Kinship in Action, Community Coalition

Increasing the number of Child Social Workers is a common sense solution to the issue of working more effectively with families and connecting them to concrete supports in times of need. Hiring should be prioritized in areas with the greatest caseload density and the worst worker to client ratios like South LA and Antelope Valley to relieve workers and allow for improved social work.

Partnering and Presenting Relative Caregivers and Organizations

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R.O.C.K. (Raising Our Children's Kids)

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